

Executive Registry
83-4332/15

SPECIAL REPORT

Foreign Media Reaction

ER-file
gmc

September 10, 1983

SOVIET PRESS CONFERENCE ON KAL INCIDENT

Summary

Media in Europe, Asia and Africa today headlined Marshal Ogarkov's press conference. Early comment felt that the Soviet military leader's explanations resulted in "more questions than answers." In Belgrade, a national radio commentator said "this press conference left some questions without proper answers."

Few media observers saw the Ogarkov explanation as doing any more than adding more lies to those already told. A typical sentiment was expressed by conservative Frankfurter Allgemeine which stated, "One lie after the other, begun with the first lie--the refusal to admit what happened."

Media analysts reviewing Marshal Ogarkov's remarks expressed disbelief at many of his contentions. The liberal Guardian of London asked in a headline, "Russians Come Clean, Or Do They?" And the conservative Daily Telegraph's Moscow correspondent reported from the press conference that some of Marshal Ogarkov's replies "brought murmurs of disbelief."

The Soviet press conference unexpectedly had an adverse affect. For example, Donga Ilbo of Seoul said the Marshal's presentation was "full of lies and invites even tougher measures against the Russians."

Moscow television service, while feeling that Western correspondents' reports were "tendentious," said "one can say with confidence that the press conference has helped to expose the lying anti-Soviet version of the incident."

United States Information Agency



WESTERN EUROPE

BRITAIN

"Kremlin Not Told Before Attack on Airliner"

Headlines today included "Moscow Admits That Missiles Destroyed Korean Airliner" (Times), "Kremlin Not Told Before Attack on Airliner" and "Soviet Chief of Staff Says Local Military Commander Took Decision to Shoot Down Korean Intruder" (Guardian), "Jet Attack Admitted by Moscow" (Daily Telegraph) and "Russia Tells How Jet Was Downed by Two Missiles" (Financial Times).

"Showed No Regret and Said Air Defense Prepared to Do It Again"

The independent Times' Moscow correspondent today reported, "Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov...yesterday told an unprecedented press conference in Moscow that the ill-fated Korean airliner had been destroyed by two missiles fired from a Sukhoi-15 fighter above Sakhalin Island.

"The decision to fire had been taken by the local air defense commander and had been referred to Moscow until after the jumbo had been shot down, killing 269 passengers on board.

"Marshal Ogarkov spoke in front of a large map of the region, using it to illustrate his contention that the Korean 747 had deviated from its route shortly after leaving Anchorage, had been in the same area as an American RC-135 reconnaissance plane and had been heading for the base of Vladivostok when its flight was terminated.

"He showed no regret, however, and said the air defenses had done their duty with credit and were prepared to defend Soviet borders again if necessary."

"Russians Come Clean, Or Do They?"

The liberal Guardian, in an inside-page article under the headline "Russians Come Clean, Or Do They?," wrote: "What has been ebbing out here and there for several days before is now comprehensive and official.

"Soviet military chief of staff Marshal Ogarkov, speaking at the press conference yesterday in Moscow--a rare event in itself--confirmed that the South Korean airliner brought down over the Sea of Okhotsk on the night of August 31 was destroyed by a Soviet fighter and that all 269 people on board had perished.

"The Soviet statement was also, for the first time, specific about the authority on which the action was taken. The order was given, it said, by the air defense commander of the Far Eastern district, though the general staff was later informed of the decision.

"The fate of the airliner was also directly linked with the activities in the same area of other American aircraft: a map demonstrating a flight path said to have been used by two RC-135s and one Orion reconnaissance plane was displayed to the press conference."

"Reply Brought Murmurs of Disbelief from Foreigners"

The conservative Daily Telegraph ran its Moscow correspondent's dispatch today under the headline "Soviet Defense Sticks to U.S. Spy Flight Claim. Moscow Denies Any Guilt in Missile Attack on Jumbo."

He reported: "The Soviet chief of staff, repudiating any suggestion of guilt, described yesterday how a Soviet fighter pilot slammed two missiles into the South Korean airliner which plunged into the North Pacific last week.

"Asked about American tapes in which a Soviet pilot reports seeing the plane's navigation and strobe lights, Marshal Ogarkov said that what the pilot really saw was lights of another Soviet jet.

"This reply brought murmurs of disbelief from foreigners at a standing room only Moscow press conference...."

The correspondent stated that Marshal Ogarkov, First Deputy Foreign Minister Korniyenko and chief Kremlin spokesman Zamyatin "were at times truculent and always defiant and never repentent.

"And more than that, they stretched credibility to the limit. Mr. Zamyatin was still raging against the United States while newsmen started filing out at the end of the two-hour session.

"He had early made the staggering claim, supported by Marshal Ogarkov, that Moscow had made clear from the very beginning what action it had taken against the 'intruder plane.'

"The announcement that the flight was terminated was in the first TASS dispatch," he said. "Maybe we understand our own language better than you."

WEST GERMANY

"No Trace of Sorrow from Soviet Side"

Pro-Christian Democratic Rheinische Post of Duesseldorf said today, "This same Ogarkov, one of the very strong men of the Kremlin, sat two months ago across from Chancellor Kohl and, during the debate about the balance of terror in Europe, spread no less cynicism then."

"The terrible thing in this affair from Sakhalin is that one week after this gruesome incident there is no trace of sorrow from the Soviet side."

"One Lie After the Other"

Conservative Frankfurter Allgemeine declared that the whole tragic affair "shows a frightening inability by the commanders of the Soviet air defense, military incompetence and a refusal to accept responsibility."

"One lie after the other, begun with the first lie: the refusal to admit what happened to the aircraft which had disappeared, up to the abrupt turnaround to half-truths."

"One can presume why the political leadership lies in such a fashion. It can not bear to have its military nor itself admitting mistakes. But because it deals in that fashion it appears as even a worse power, one which recognizes its international neighbors only as enemies and owes them no truth, no decent behavior and no concern..."

ITALY

"Final Admission After Nine Days"

Headlines in Italy today included: "Final Admission After Nine Days...Moscow Admits Having Used Missiles, Having Found First Body" (Corriere della Sera), "Jumbo Wasn't There by Mistake...According to Russians, It Was On A Spy Mission...As to 269 Dead--'Too Bad' But Nothing More" (Il Giornale) and "Kremlin Responds to Accusations...Two Missiles Against Spy Plane...Moscow Affirms It Was Not An Accident or An Error" (La Repubblica).

Ogarkov "Impassive...Stentorian...Without Emotion"

A Moscow correspondent for centrist La Stampa of Turin described Marshal Ogarkov at the Moscow press conference as "displaying the security of a great surgeon, impassive, with stentorian voice, without betraying a trace of emotion..."

BELGIUM

"Soviets Confess While Accusing Washington"

In Belgium today the Moscow press conference was widely reported in straightforward coverage both on radio/TV and in the press. Some headlines were "Soviets Now Also Admit: South Korean Boeing Shot Down With Two Missiles" (Het Laatste Nieuws), "Moscow: Missiles Shot Down 'Spy' Boeing" (De Standaard), "Moscow on Boeing: Soviets Fired 130 Warning Shots" (De Morgen), "Marshall Ogarkov Explains in Detail Why USSR Had to Shoot Down the Boeing" (La Meuse/La Lanterne), "South Korean Boeing Drama...The Soviets Confess While Accusing Washington" (La Libre Belgique).

Soviets Continue to Use "Stupefying Logic"

The only paper to offer a general comment, La Meuse/La Lanterne, wrote today that "this wholly execeptional press conference by a Red Army Marshal indicates to what extent the Army controls this whole affair. It is the Army that provides the explanations..."

"It is the Army which discusses, polemicizes and controls what has become today a political affair. The Red Army thus seems to be in a comfortable position in the USSR..."

"The Soviets continue to reason with their 'stupefying' logic: they accept to discuss, to nuance facts, to change their versions, but stick to the essentials without the slightest nuance....It is obvious in their view that their intervention against the KAL 007 flight was entirely justified."

NETHERLANDS

"Moscow Rejects (Its) Guilt"

Headlines were "Moscow Rejects Guilt in Boeing Shooting...NATO in Consultation Over Sanctions Against Soviet Union" (Trouw) and "Chief of Staff in Moscow: Boeing Destroyed Because of Espionage" (De Volkskrant).

SPAIN

"He Was Not Able to Clarify What Happened"

Leading center-left Madrid daily El Pais today carried the Ogarkov news conference under the headline "Soviet Chief of Staff Justifies Bringing Down Jumbo."

Conservative ABC, in a report headed "Explaining the Unexplainable," said, "He was not able to clarify for us, not to say, justify to us, what had happened and who was responsible."

Centrist Dairio 16 ran a Spanish wire service story under the headline "Moscow Admits Bringing Down Jumbo Jet With Missiles." There has been no other comment."

EASTERN EUROPE

SOVIET UNION

"Press Conference Helped Expose Lying Anti-Soviet Version"

Moscow Television Service in Russian last night said the Moscow press conference organized by the Defense and Foreign Ministries "is now at the center of foreign mass media."

The report added, "All the main press agencies of the world are giving detailed accounts. Our teletype machine is continuing to receive numerous reports in which correspondents quote what was said by Comrades Ogarkov, Korniyenko and Zamyatin."

"A correspondent of the British agency, Reuters, for example, singles out the words that the Soviet action in stopping the flight of the South Korean aircraft was undertaken only after all other possible means had been used in order to detain the aircraft, which was obviously carrying out a planned intelligence mission."

"A correspondent of the U.S. Associated Press agency turns attention to the fact that the facts presented by Marshal Ogarkov are in sharp contrast to what was said in speeches by President Reagan and by Romberg, spokesman for the State Department."

"The reports of certain Western correspondents have a tendentious character, but one can say with confidence that the press conference has helped to expose the lying anti-Soviet version of the incident involving the South Korean aircraft as fabricated by the American special services and the White House, and has shown the true shape of things."

Called A "Most Flagrant Violation of USSR Airspace"

Moscow TASS, reporting today on the press conference, quoted one of the other participants--First Deputy Foreign Minister Korniyenko in his answer to a Pravda correspondent: "I should point out that the U.S. Government has recognized the fact that a most flagrant violation of the Soviet Union's airspace has taken place."

"However, Washington has to this very day failed to provide the answer to a single legitimate question arising in conjunction with that: why did the South Korean plane, upon leaving the United States, soon veer off the established international route by nearly 500 kilometers toward the Soviet Union's territory?"

"Why, if it were an ordinary passenger flight, did not the U.S. navigation services, which control air traffic in the zone for which they are responsible, sound the alarm as soon as the plane left the path allocated to it...?"

YUGOSLAVIA

"Left Some Questions Without Proper Answers"

Belgrade domestic radio in Serbo-Croatian today reported on the Moscow press conference, quoting among other things comments by First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Korniyenko.

The report said he "rejected American demands that the Soviet Union apologize for shooting down the South Korean airplane and that it pay damages.

"He shifted the blame for the entire incident onto the American side, asserting that the airplane did not stray, but that its flight over important Soviet strategic bases was planned in advance and that therefore both the apology and the indemnity are owed by the Americans.

"Nevertheless, it seems that this press conference left some questions without proper answers. This refers above all to concrete proof about the spying activities of the airplane and to the supposition that the Soviet side possesses a recording of the conversation between the South Korean pilot and his radio control."

HUNGARY

"Deliberate Reconnaissance Action"

In Budapest today, Nepszava ran the headline "Washington and Tokyo Taking Anti-Soviet Measures" over a story charging that the incident of the KAL involved "a conscious, deliberate, planned reconnaissance action which was directed from the United States and Japan..."

BULGARIA

"Systematically Planned Intelligence Operation"

Headlines in Sofia today were "Defense of One's Own Borders--The Sovereign Right of Every Nation" (Rabotichesko Delo) and "The Incident Was A Premeditated, Systematically Planned Intelligence Operation" (Zemedelsko Zname).

Papers Carried TASS Reports

Bulgarian papers carried almost identical partial texts of the Ogarkov press conference, picked up from TASS. There has been no separate editorial comment.

FAR EAST AND PACIFIC

SOUTH KOREA

"No Survivors"

Headlines in Seoul today on the Ogarkov press conference included "KAL Plane Exploded in the Sky--There Were No Survivors" (Hankook Ilbo), "No Obligation to Compensate--KAL Plane Shot Down by Two Missiles" (Seoul Shinmun), "Shot Down by Two Missiles--Soviets Officially Confirm Shooting Down Plane for First Time" (Chosun Ilbo) and "Shot Down by Two Missiles --Order Given by Soviet Far Eastern Commander" (Joong Ilbo).

"Ogarkov Consistent in Self-Justification"

Hankook Ilbo said in an inside-page story said that Marshal Ogarkov "was consistent in self-justification rather than disclosing the truth" and concluded that the news conference "left more questions than it gave answers."

"Lies Invite Tougher Measures Against Russians"

Donga Ilbo said the news conference was "full of lies...and invites even tougher measures against the Russians." The paper insisted the Soviets "slaughtered" the passengers in order to erase all evidence of the attack. It will be impossible for the Soviet genius to deceive world opinion, and conscience demands escalation against the Soviets if they continue to try to shift the blame onto the United States and the airliner."

SOUTH ASIA

INDIA

"Plane Shot Down Only After It Tried to Escape Interceptor Planes"

Media today gave prominent news coverage to Marshal Ogarkov's press conference remarks. The independent Statesman carried a two-paragraph report. Pro-Government National Herald and pro-Moscow Patriot published the full text of Marshal Ogarkov's press statement. There was no immediate editorial comment.

Major newspapers with national circulation carried Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) accounts of the Soviet press conference.

"KAL Jet Was Spying: Soviet Army Chief"

Headlines included "KAL Jet Was Spying: Soviet Army Chief" (Times of India), "Boeing 'Tried' to Escape" (Hindustan Times) and "Soviet Armed Forces Chief's Version" (Statesman).

"Commission Report: 'Deliberately Planned Intelligence Operation'"

The left-of-center Times of India carried UNI's report which said, "Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, the Soviet army chief, said today that the Korean Airlines Boeing 747 shot down by the Soviet jets was 'a spy plane carrying out the mission entrusted to it by the U.S. intelligence service.'"

"He said the Soviet regional command post ordered the plane to be brought down only after being convinced that the aircraft which had violated Soviet air space for more than two and one-half hours was on an espionage mission.

"Addressing a news conference, attended by more than 500 correspondents, he said a commission appointed to go into the incident had also concluded 'irrefutably' that the intrusion of the Korean plane was a 'deliberately, thoroughly planned intelligence operation.'"

SRI LANKA

Preview of Press Conference

Three English-language morning dailies today carried Reuters accounts of the Ogarkov press conference but all presented it as a preview of an event which will take place.

Headlines were: "Top Military and Kremlin Officials Face Press" (Island), "Top Military Officials Face Press on Jet Issue" (Daily Mirror) and "Rare Press Briefing on Airline Issue" (Daily News).

AFRICA

ZIMBABWE

"Ogarkov Rejected Demands for Compensation"

The Herald of Harare said today that Marshal Ogarkov "told a news conference that the Soviet fighters shot down the airliner with missiles when it ignored orders to land and he rejected demands that the Soviet Union should pay compensation for the airliner and its 269 passengers..."

In another story on the press conference, the same paper said, "Saying two air-to-air missiles were used to down the plane, Marshal Ogarkov added there were 'unfortunately no survivors. No bodies were spotted. By the way we do not know exactly the point of splashdown.'"